

An HH-65A helicopter from Air Station Barbers Point hoovers over the two Navy men after they were spotted by a C-130.

Navy Men Cling to life after capsizing at sea

Their misery began early Saturday morning when the monstrous wave crashed into the small boat – not tipping it over – but nearly filling it with water. It was the second wave that finished the job. With a coconut and two small bottles of water to sustain them for the next 48 hours, the two men clung to the slippery bottom of their capsized boat.

"Sitting on a boat is pure misery," said Navy Master Chief Greg Foster. "It was hard to be comfortable; we were cold and miserable."

Foster and fishing partner Navy Chief Roy Sokolowski were expecting to have a relaxing day of fishing off Barbers Point Oahu Feb. 24 when their world was turned upside down.

"We knew we were in big trouble, but we were only three miles from Barbers," Foster said. "We thought we had a good chance of being rescued. But as the afternoon wore on, it became apparent that was not the case."

By PA | John Moss
Photos courtesy
Air Station Barbers Point

They struggled to climb back on top of the slick hull when occasional waves would knock them off. They tried to remember stories and books they had read of others in similar circumstances. They tried to remember their Navy training, but their minds were also crowded with thoughts of friends and family back home.

Sokolowski's wife became worried when the men didn't return home Saturday night, she called friends who called the Coast Guard.

"At about 4 a.m. we saw a Coast Guard helicopter looking for us, but it was far away and still fairly dark," Foster said. "Then later on that day, we saw a Coast Guard C-130. At least we knew they were looking for us."

Foster and Sokolowski lost most of their supplies when the boat capsized. Their cooler with food



was trapped under the boat. They managed to pull the cooler out late in the afternoon on Sunday, but found gasoline had ruined everything but the two bottles of water. Toward dusk, though, the men spotted a coconut floating nearby.


"Roy swam out and got it," Foster said. "I never thought I'd be so happy to see a coconut. He cracked it on the bottom of the boat and then we both shucked it and ate it with a little more water and then settled down for the night."

By Monday morning, the men weren't sure if they could make another night. With waves knocking them off the hull, it was getting harder to climb back up. Their energy was drained and they had long since lost sight of land. It was then Foster noticed the Coast Guard C-130 airplane over Sokolowski's shoulder and started waving a red marker flag.

"It probably ranks up there with the happiest day of my life," Foster said.

The C-130 crew found them 5.5 miles west of Barbers Point and dropped a life raft with a radio and survival equipment to the two men. Forty-five minutes later two Dolphin helicopters were hovering overhead. They hoisted the men and returned them to Barbers Point where ambulances were waiting. The men and women at Coast Guard Air Station Barbers Point cheered as Foster and Sokolowski emerged from the helicopters.

In all, a combined 82 hours were spent searching for the missing men adding together the efforts of Navy P-3 airplanes, Coast Guard C-130 airplanes and H-65 helicopters, the Coast Guard cutters Asatrague and Point Evans, and Coast Guard Station Honolulu small boats.

Foster and Sokolowski were listed in satisfactory condition when they reached the hospital suffering from hypothermia, dehydration and exposure. They were released one week after their ordeal began. 



Navy Master Chief Greg Foster is welcomed to a waiting ambulance after spending 48 hours in the open ocean.

Will to Survive
Capsized 3 miles
from shore
2 Bottles of water
1 Coconut
48 hours in the water
Rescued 55 miles
from shore

LIGHTS OUT ON Lanai

By Lt. Karen Jones
MSO Honolulu

Alth ... a few minutes of free time and you're cutled up with the a copy of your favorite novel ... oops - don't forget the light - don't want to hurt your eyes? What did you just take for granted in that scene? Sure, everyone you know can read, and no one ever takes free time for granted, but what about that glow above your head, reflecting off the pages, did you take that for granted? The 3,000 residents of the Hawaiian island of

Lanai, probably did this past November, unaware that strong winds were creating an urgent situation in their backyard.

The tiny island of Lanai receives the diesel fuel for its generators from a tank barge that makes regular calls into the harbor of Kaunaloa. The barge ties up, hooks up, and delivers the fuel necessary to keep the electrical generating plant in business, making power. In one visit, the barge can fill the storage facility's tanks.

Kaunaloa Harbor is a small port on the southwest coast of Lanai. It is the only harbor on the island available to receive shipping services,

such as the inter-island barge services that bring containers of supplies to the island, and of course, the regular fuel delivery. The harbor is normally protected by a breakwater, but it has fallen into a state of disrepair. Normally this damaged breakwater does not present a problem. But during the winter months, Kona, or southerly winds, are frequent. When the wind blows like this, the harbor is afforded little protection from the storm surges created.

During these strong winds, the tank barge remains outside the harbor until it is safe to enter. The swells can be severe enough that if a barge is already in the harbor when the weather kicks up, the barge is bounced around at the pier, like a cork. Several alternatives to this delivery system have been discussed by the state, local interests, the electric company, the carrier of the fuel, and

MSO Honolulu.

The most obvious solution is to repair the breakwater, but that comes with a \$12 million price tag. Construction of a smaller barge to more safely make the transfer, using a tug to carry the fuel, building a larger storage tank that could hold enough fuel to last through the winter, and even weather restrictions on the harbor were discussed. No one had \$12 million, there are no vessels small enough to deliver the fuel that are certificated to do so, and any construction would not solve the immediate problem of getting fuel to the island while the Kona winds continued to hold the delivery barge off shore.

While alternatives were being considered, the fuel supply continued to dwindle.



Hawaii State Archives

The breakwater in Kaunaloa Harbor has deteriorated over the years.

Residents and tourists on Lanai continued to turn on lights, vacuum rugs, watch TV, and boot up computers blissfully unaware of the crisis.

In November, the storage tanks for the power company were dangerously close to running out, and Murphy being the prophet he is, the conditions in the harbor were too rough for the barge to enter. Chevron, the company who supplies the fuel, proposed the use of a recently certificated vessel, the American Islander, to supply the fuel. One problem - this vessel was only certificated to carry passengers. Carrying fuel as cargo would mean outfitting the vessel with a stream of additional equipment, and it would take weeks to complete a review of the plan for these new systems. The fuel for the power plant was anticipated to run out in less than one week.

Because of the urgency, Commanding Officer Marine Safety Office Honolulu, Capt. Samuel Burton, ordered that efforts be focused on reviewing the proposal to outfit the American Islander to carry fuel. In 14 hours, plans were reviewed, revised, and eventually approved. At 7 p.m. that day, an inspector from the MSO began the physical inspection of the additional firefighting, venting piping, and other equipment necessary to safely carry fuel. The new cargo piping was pressure tested, and failed repeatedly. Finally, at around 4 a.m. the next day, the piping was repaired, the inspection was complete, and there was another certificated fuel-carrying vessel in the Hawaiian Islands. The American Islander departed immediately after the inspection to load fuel, and began its voyage to Lanai, where someone, somewhere was turning off their electric alarm clock, and turning on a light to begin a new day.



Kaunaloa Harbor on the southwest coast of Lanai.



Hawaii State Archives



four people on station, diving was impossible. So the Mallow lightened it's belt and did without three of it's crew for 40 days.

Mallow initially projected the need for three divers, but when one of the ship's current divers extended, the requirement dropped. "All three crew members qualified and earned the chance to go to school, so we sent them anyway," said Lt. Duke Walker, Mallow's Executive Officer. "You hope everyone is going to pass, but because of the attrition rate, it's always in the back of your mind that you may only get one or two making it through. That all three passed is definitely a big plus for the ship, and a real credit to our three men."

Of the last five candidates the Mallow sent to attend the course, only one completed the high risk training. Most dropped out because of difficulty with the physical requirements. "We were sending people over who weren't prepared," said Mallow's diving officer, Lt. j.g. Bron Stewart. "When we sent these three over, we made sure they knew what to expect."

Preparation included many practicing techniques in the pool, daily runs of four and five miles, and lots of push ups, pull ups and sit ups. This became more important as Naval Submarine Training Center forced the candidates to compete with 27 Navy sailors and Marines for the remaining 25 slots.

To get in they had to do well in the initial physical test: A 500 yard swim within 14 minutes, 43 push ups within two minutes, 50 sit ups within two minutes, six pull ups, and a mile and a half run in under 12 and a half minutes. Preparation

payed off, they passed, while six others had to drop out.

"The difficulty most sailors have with the training is that they are at sea and don't have a chance to get in the kind of shape required," said Director of Dive Training, Lt. David Davis, USN. When asked about the attrition rate Davis replied, "The attrition rate for scuba school is around 20% overall; it is difficult to say what the rate is for the Coast Guard because of the small number of Coast Guardsman that go through."

The six weeks consists of classes in diving medicine, scuba procedures, and dive physics as well as actual dives that begin in a pool, move on to pier side and end with boat dives to a depth of 130 feet. During training the instructors include plenty of physical training; affectionately known as "PT." PT begins every morning, rain or shine, hell or high water. Sprints around Ford Island, push ups, flatter kicks, eight count body builders, and many other calisthenics are used to help students become strong divers.

Safety is a primary concern during the course. At any time students have the option of stopping simply by saying "I quit." Also, if students don't understand what is going on, or feel that training is proceeding in an unsafe manner, they can call a training time out, and all training will stop.

Though the training is high risk, the instructors are alert to any problems the students might have to ensure their security. "Safety is of the utmost importance to all of the instructors here," said Instructor EM2 Troy Lark, USN.

Though difficult, all of the new divers agreed that the training was worth it. "I'm glad I was afforded the opportunity to go to dive training; it was one of the big reasons I came to Hawaii" said Podraz. "I wanted to be the corpsman on a 180' as well as a member of the dive team." Asked how formidable the training was, Podraz replied, "There were times during the training where I wondered if I would finish it, but I would just think of what I would get to do after graduation. Also, having support from my family and from the command made things much easier."

Layton said, "The training was rigorous and challenging but having other Coasties in the class



made it easier. We all wanted to graduate together so it was like a wall behind you, pushing you to make it through."

Gorman said, "Being a Coast Guard diver is a very rare and unique opportunity; there are only a handful out there. There are really no other schools that our service has the chance to go to that are as physically demanding as the dive schools. I feel lucky that I had support from my wife, or school would have been ten times harder."

Now all three are authorized to wear the scuba pin; a breast insignia consisting of a wet suit hood, face mask and double hose regulator. This not only signifies that they have completed a tough and challenging course of instruction, but they are part of one of the smallest groups throughout the entire U.S. military. They are now Coast Guard Divers.

Above: YN2 Gorman. Top facing page: SA Layton and HS2 Podraz prepare gear before training. Bottom facing page: Dive pin earned by divers.

By YN2 Andrew Gorman

Photos courtesy of Mallow

Navy qualified divers are on board the Coast Guard Cutter Mallow. No the Navy hasn't crossed over and given up the traditional rivalry. The Mallow sent three of its crew to a six-week Navy scuba course. SA Abraxas Layton, YN2 Andrew Gorman and HS2 Christopher Podraz on the Cutter Mallow completed the training and joined the community of 34 diver blibles in the Coast Guard. Mallow had two of six diver blibles filled, but since dives require

Surfing.
Shooting the tube.
Hangin' ten.
What a radical, gnarly, tubular, podacious,
mondo cool kinda thing.

You get to be the big kahuna - Right?

Not really.

"Surfing's just really good exercise. It's a way to escape from the pressures of life," says Dennis Kaczmarek. "It's an awesome feeling of freedom."

As a chief aviation survivorahm, Kaczmarek is the head rescue swimmer at Coast Guard Air Station Barbiers Point. He's also a 20-year veteran surfer.

He began surfing when he was 13 years old, growing up in Dana Point, Calif. He and his friends taught themselves to surf, heading to the beach after school and on the weekends. They used to pull their surf boards behind their bikes on homemade trailers.

"We lived about a quarter mile from the beach, so every day we'd get off school and ride our bikes down to the beach with our boards on these funky looking trailers," says Kaczmarek. He says surfing was the cool thing to do. "It was just a craze."

Everyone in Southern California wanted to surf."

His sun-tanned skin and blond hair seem to fit the typical surfer mold, but Kaczmarek can't be considered a beach bum. He supervises 13 other ASMs in one of the larger ASM shops in the Coast Guard. They maintain all of the station's survival equipment and fly rescue missions both as rescue swimmers and as emergency medical technicians. "I've been trained to jump from helicopters and pull people from the water under some of the most severe weather conditions."

"Surfing is perfect for rescue swimmers because you get beat up in the surf and that prepares you for your job in a hostile environment," Kaczmarek says.

Many of his fellow rescue swimmers like to surf in choppy conditions to build their confidence for handling themselves out in the open ocean.

"When you go surfing on an 8- to 10-foot day, you get to know what to expect," he says. "It helps you when you go out on a high seas rescue with 6- to 8-foot seas. You've seen something like it before."

The largest waves he's surfed have been between 15 and 18 feet, but he prefers to stay with waves under 8 feet. He said surfing can be a dangerous sport if the proper precautions aren't taken, so he tries to play it safe.

"I know what my limits are and I think I have good common sense to know when to get out of the water. I don't think it would look very good in the papers to read 'Coast Guard rescue swimmer drowns.'"

When out in large waves, a surfer runs the risk of being held under water as successive waves crash on top of them. Kaczmarek said the longest he's been held under water was close to a minute. "I thought I was dead," Kaczmarek says. "I knew I was in trouble, so I tried to relax to keep from burning up more energy. I reverted to some helicopter inversion training we go through. With big waves, you can be held under a long time ... even a short time seems like a long time."

Kaczmarek has been a competitive surfer since 1981, taking part in more competitions than he can count and winning many along the way. In fact, he recently threw away all of his trophies because he didn't have room for them at home. He's been given free surf boards by manufacturers to promote their products and has had his name appear in national surfing magazines. He takes part in a competition about once every two months. He surfs with both long boards and short boards. However, with the new design changes to long boards that make them more maneuverable, he prefers to compete with them.

The Coast Guard has given Kaczmarek the opportunity to live near prime surf areas and to travel to other parts of the world. He's been to the Caribbean, Barbados, Baja California, mainland Mexico, Costa Rica, Fiji, Tahiti, Samoa and Raihupo.

"I've traveled all over the place surfing different types of waves. Every wave is different."

But he says Hawaii is probably the premier place to surf.

"When we were growing up, everybody dreamed of surfing in Hawaii," he says. "We have a spot right out here in front of the station. It's one of the best spots on the island when it breaks. Not many people know about it or have access to it. We call it the Jetty."

Most of the Coast Guard people who surf talk to each other and know about this spot. Puerto Rico has a spot called Willemess and we have the Jetty."

Kaczmarek tries to surf about five days a week, preferring the north and west shores of Oahu. Being single, he says he can get out quiet often. He's also a life guard in his spare time which gives him an opportunity to get into the surf.

"I grew up around the water. If I got stuck someplace away from the water where I couldn't surf, I'd go crazy. It's part of my life."

He says some of his childhood friends envy his current lifestyle.

"The friends I grew up with went to college while I joined the Coast Guard. They're working 9- to-5 jobs. Now when we get together, they say they wished they had done what I did."

Kaczmarek says the Coast Guard was a good choice for him. It helped him reach a goal to be part of a rescue organization while staying close to the water.

"I planned to only stay for four years and get out," he says. "But I like it so much, I don't know what I'd do now if I had to get out."

a wave



PAJ John Moss



PAJ John Moss

Dennis M. Kaczmarek

33 years old

12 years

Coast Guard service

Cutter Sassafras.

Honolulu 1983-1985

Air Station Barbiers Point.

Hawaii 1985-1988

Air Station San Diego.

California 1988-1992

Air Station Barbiers Point.

Hawaii 1992-present

